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How do secondary school music teachers view creativity? A report on educators’ views of teaching composing skills

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores secondary school music teachers’ views of creativity and some of their ideas about teaching composing skills. In order to do this, firstly an initial explanation of past and present controversies surrounding the meaning of the term creativity is given. The centralised production of music curricula during the 1990s has unified the knowledge pupils are expected to ‘attain’. However, issues concerning creativity, its meanings and their interpretation remain because they have not been resolved by centralised policy production. Secondly, different approaches taken by several studies on creativity are reviewed and a four-fold framework for researching music teachers’ views of creativity is suggested (i.e. Pupil - Environment - Process - Product). Finally, preliminary results of an enquiry carried out in England with six teachers are presented for consideration. A qualitative research design was used to allow teachers to reflect on their ideas. Selected videotaped extracts of their own lessons on composition and improvisation were used for the purpose of discussion with participants during later interviews. The process of analysis was assisted by a software package for qualitative research (i.e. NUDIST). The conclusions drawn from the interviews indicated to some new categories and subcategories that supported the initial framework. The focus in this paper is on the teachers’ definitions of creativity, their role in teaching composing skills and the positive influence of teaching in developing their own creativity. The teachers’ comments revealed some of the complexities embraced within the concept of creativity and its use in music education.

Introduction

Creativity is an ambiguous term. The overuse of the word in everyday life and in many academic fields (e.g. arts, philosophy and science) has led to a loss in its meaning. ‘Creativity’ is frequently mentioned in educational documents with little effort made to define what is meant by the word.

It may be suggested that in music education, creativity is an umbrella term including composition and improvisation, though the term could be applied to listening (i.e. creative listening), performance (i.e. creative performance) and almost all music curriculum activities. During the 1970s proposals for music curriculum activities emphasising the idea of ‘creative

work’ were popular in schools (Paynter, 1982). Disagreements did however arise surrounding the uses of creativity because of the ambiguities in its meaning and the discrepancies about the theories informing the new proposals for practice (White, 1968; Elliot, 1971; Swanwick, 1974 and Plummeridge, 1980). Elliot (1971) identified two different concepts of creativity, which he called the ‘traditional’ and the ‘new’. The traditional is ascribed to people who contribute to a field and whose contributions are recognised by the community. It has no significance in the school context. This concept, implanted in the uses of ordinary language, is related to the myth of creation and does not allow creativity to be attributed to those who bring ‘no new thing into being’ (Elliot, 1971: 139). It stresses the value of the ‘products’. In contrast, the new concept is related to the psychological notion of ‘imaginative thinking’ and has broad applications in the school context. Within this concept, creativity is imagination successfully manifested in any valued pursuit, a thinking style manifested in actions. Confusion arises when accounts of the new concept are presented as if they were characterisations of the traditional one. Is this ‘new’ concept, or what has also been called ‘little c’ creativity (Craft, 2000), that the present study is concerned with.

The centralised production of music curricula in recent years has unified the knowledge that pupils are expected to gain by the end of their schooling. Issues concerning creativity and its interpretation remain nonetheless because they are not resolved by the centralised production of policy (Berkley 2001; Gibbs, 1994; Green, 1990, 2000; Odam, 2000; Odena Caballol, 1999). In the most recent edition of the English National Curriculum for Music, for example, the word creativity is used in two different ways: (a) stating the value of creativity as a desirable ‘thinking style’;

Music provides opportunities to promote:

- thinking skills, through analysis and evaluation of music, adopting and developing musical ideas and working creatively, reflectively and spontaneously [emphasis mine].

(Department for Education and Employment and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [DFEE and QCA], 1999a: 9)

(b) Including activities such as improvisation and composition under the rubric of ‘creativity’:

Creating and developing musical ideas – composing skills [Key stage 3, age 11-14]

Pupils should be taught how to:

a improvise, exploring and developing musical ideas when performing

b produce, develop and extend musical ideas, selecting and combining resources within musical structures and given genres, styles and traditions [emphasis mine].

(DFEE and QCA, 1999b: 172)

Recent studies on educators’ views of creativity have indicated that teachers of arts subjects interpret creativity and their teaching in personal terms (Fryer and Collings, 1991a, 1991b). Fryer (1996) carried out a comprehensive study involving 1028 educators from a range of subjects and levels, and pointed out the need for further research into the factors associated with the teachers’ different perceptions of creativity.

In music education research, increasing interest has been displayed in the study of creativity, including studies concerned with composition and improvisation (Kennedy, 1999; Brinkman, 1999; Burnard, 2000a, 2000b; De Souza Fleith, Militao, Alves and Siqueira, 2000). In these

studies, music students and professional musicians have reflected on their processes of composition and improvisation. It has been suggested, however, that there is a lack of research into the views of music educators (Odena, 2001a). Teachers have their own views of creativity and these views have an influence on their pedagogic approach and assessment of activities involving the creative process. In the next two sections the theoretical framework and the methodology used in a doctoral study of English music educators’ views of creativity are explained. In the last section some of the findings are discussed.

A theoretical four-fold framework for researching teachers’ thinking on creativity

A detailed review of the educational literature suggests four ways to approach the study of creativity: the personality traits of creative pupils (Torrance, 1963, 1975; Cropley, 1992; Runco, Johnson and Bear, 1993); the appropriate environment for developing creativity (Amabile, 1983; Fryer, 1996; Beetlestone, 1998); the creative process (Bennett, 1975, 1976); the definition of the creative product (Hamilyn, 1972; Fryer and Collings, 1991a).

Regarding the personality traits, by and large creative pupils have been described as active, curious, enthusiastic, imaginative, capable of sustaining hard work, non-conformist and inclined to avoid restrictive schedules (Cropley, 1992; Runco *et al.*, 1993). Taking the environment for creativity, it has been suggested (Odena, 2000) that an important point for developing creative processes is the availability of a ‘good’ environment, including resources and space to work individually (i.e. physical climate). Amabile (1983) also pointed out that intrinsic motivation is a key factor for creative performance. This intrinsic motivation is what Beetlestone (1998) called ‘intellectual climate’. The activities and the learning interests of the students may engender this motivation.

Regarding the definition of the creative product, Fryer (1996) described the preferred criteria of the teachers in her sample for judging the pupils’ creativity as ‘original for the pupil’ and ‘imaginative’. These studies nevertheless, were characterised by short explanations when discussing music education issues, providing a superficial understanding of what goes on in music educational settings. In addition, previous studies tried to elucidate the general educators’ views of creativity by focussing on their perceptions of creative pupils and the pupils’ work, while ignoring the process of creativity. Other authors analysed the process of creativity of various individuals (e.g. professionals, artists, students) and the environment in which this seemed to occur, while avoiding the issue of what was to be considered as a ‘creative product’. It may well seem then, that the enquiry on music teachers’ views of creativity would benefit by broadening the approach of previous studies and examining all four fields: Pupil - Environment - Process - Product (Odena, 2001b). These themes for enquiry are however abstract constructs drawn from the literature and they lack the clarity of everyday language. If we were to ask teachers about these four fields we may well be at risk of imposing our theoretical constructs on their personal views. The issue then is how to make the teachers’ own views clear.

How to make teachers’ views explicit? Some methodological considerations

Runco *et al* (1993) suggested that some investigations of teachers’ views of creativity had limitations in terms of validity. They argued that some of these studies (e.g. Treffinger, Ripple and Dacey, 1968; Torrance, 1963) appeared to be based on explicit theories developed

by professional social scientists who formulated tests to question the degree to which educators would agree or disagree with their hypotheses.

In order to prevent this limitation, the intention in the present enquiry was not to ask participants directly about constructs of theoretical creativity outlined in academic writing. Instead, participants were interviewed presenting in front of them extracts of their own videotaped classroom music lessons and asked to comment upon them. This enabled an explanation of the participants' views in their own words instead of using the technical-academic concepts from the literature. The intention was, moreover, to explore further the 'why' of their ideas about creativity.

Because the aim of this study was to cover a range of teachers' views, it was decided to adopt what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call a 'purposive' approach to selecting the participants. Lincoln and Guba note that purposive sampling increases the scope or range of data exposed. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest that in sampling within a qualitative approach, what is important is the potential of each participant to help the researcher to develop theoretical insights into the area of knowledge studied. Having focussed the study on school music teachers, the intention was to involve participants with different backgrounds, teaching in a variety of contexts from several secondary schools. Initially it was considered that six teachers would probably provide a broad range of potential views, even though it was recognised that it might be necessary to involve more teachers at a later stage.

To facilitate the observation of a wide range of teaching views in each participant, each teacher was video taped over several lessons. A single researcher could not follow all participants' activities within the music curriculum during the whole academic year. It was necessary to focus on a specific range of activities. It was assumed activities involving music composition and/or improvisation would best facilitate the emergence of teachers' views on creativity. It would seem likely that teachers associate creativity with 'composing' (e.g. Kratus, 1990; Reimer and Wright, 1992; Webster, 1996; Pitts, 1998). While the focus was on this type of activities, the intention was to observe and videotape the whole lesson because of the importance of being aware of and understanding the context. It was agreed with participants to observe Years 7, 8 and 9 groups only (Key Stage 3, age 11-14) because, unlike older groups, these were not under the pressure of the GCSE examinations. Moreover, music at Key Stage 3 is compulsory, and this allowed the researcher to observe mixed ability groups.

Some practicalities regarding the dates and times for the interviews and the visits for classroom observation were personally discussed and agreed with each teacher during a preliminary school visit. The intention was to make clear to participants that the aim of the inquiry was completely non-judgemental. The researcher's position was not that of an inspector aiming to judge the rights and wrongs of music teacher methods, nor did the observer have the knowledge to evaluate them. Instead, it was expected the researcher would play a learning role, trying to collect the views of the participants and building a relationship of trust with them. To this end participants were provided with information about the author's background and experience, the background of the study and the research techniques. It was always explained to prospective participants that classroom observations would be videotaped with the sole purpose of selecting extracts for a later interview where they, then, would comment on their own lessons. It was also noted that names of schools and teachers participating in the study would be changed for confidentiality purposes. As noted in the

literature (e.g. Brown and Dowling, 1998) school descriptions are not to be disclosed in detail because it could lead to identifying the participants. Therefore the names of the teachers quoted in the last section have been changed.

Teachers arranged their classrooms as they wished (i.e. activities, settings, etc.). The intention was to record the whole lesson each time, because of the importance of understanding the activities within the context. The aim was to videotape what was taking place in terms of:

- What **pupils** did the teacher regard as creative?
- What were their characteristics and attitudes?
- How was the appropriate **environment** for developing creativity considered by the teacher, including classroom settings, teaching methods, music programme and school culture?
- How did the teacher consider the creative **process** of their students?
- How was the assessment of creativity in the students’ **products** carried out?
- What criteria were used in such evaluation?

The classroom observations, nevertheless, should not be seen as ends in themselves but as a starting point. It is necessary to remember that the focus of the enquiry was on the teachers’ own views of creativity; not on the lessons *per se* but on how participants talked about their lessons. The classroom observation was intended to identify attitudes and behaviours which appeared to frame teachers’ views, in order to focus the interview themes and questions. Extracts from the lessons concentrated on areas observed upon which participants might be able to comment, and were selected following the four themes of the theoretical framework previously explained. The effectiveness of the interviews, thereafter, partially depended on the potential of the extracts to get participants talking about their views of creativity. In addition, teachers had the opportunity to validate the choice and to raise issues that may have been overlooked.

Judging from the various levels of freedom given to the participant, the interviews included in this study may be characterised as ‘semi-structured’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). The conversations with teachers were different and characterised by open-ended questions. Participants were invited to comment on a selection of extracts from their own videotaped lessons. A selection of twenty five to thirty minutes of footage was edited for each participant, always using the tapes of their own lessons. After each extract the teacher was invited to make comments, elicited by questions such as ‘what is your immediate response to this extract?’ or ‘would you try to describe what you were doing here?’. Some of the questions focussed around inviting participants to describe each extract and encouraging them to clarify or elaborate issues they had raised. Other questions were stimulated by the teachers’ responses or referred to something the teacher had done or said in the extract. The conversation was directed partially by the responses of the teacher, although where appropriate, the researcher tried to introduce questions of a more general nature concerning issues of creativity raised from the four-fold framework.

The aim of these interviews was to concentrate on ‘conversations with purpose’ as outlined by Burgess (1988). The main purpose was to give a voice to the teachers, to let them reflect on the extracts selected from their teaching in their own words. The teachers’ responses from the transcripts were analysed through the four-fold approach. The aim of this was not to test

the framework but to interpret the emerging issues in a consistent way. Presenting videotaped extracts, as described above, facilitated the subsequent coding of data under four broad themes. The researcher was, nevertheless, open to the incorporation of any new theme that emerged from the interviews. The final categories were derived from the literature and conversations held with participants.

References coded under the ‘pupil’ theme included teachers’ comments on creative students and descriptions of students’ attitudes. Comments on the classroom settings, the teacher’s role when teaching composing skills, the curriculum and the school culture were included under the ‘environment’ theme. The ‘process’ theme included statements about the different stages in pupils’ compositions, as well as the general stages of the activities. Statements coded within the ‘product’ theme included those referring to the teachers’ descriptions of student’s work, as well as any other references to the criteria used for their assessment. Some statements fell into two themes. In such cases the relationship was noted and categorised according to the context of the conversation. A further process of data reduction was carried out, producing categories and subcategories under each of the main themes. Some of the categories within the ‘product’ theme focused on originality and musical style; some other coded under ‘students’ were adaptor pupils and innovator pupils; and structured/unstructured under ‘process’.

The approach to analysis and interpretation of data attempted not only to give voice to the teachers’ interpretations and theories, but also to consider the outcomes and emerging issues in the context of the general framework. The software program Nvivo was used to assist with the coding of the transcripts. NVivo is the latest version of NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising), a program for computer assisted qualitative data analysis. The advantages and disadvantages of using computers in qualitative research have been widely discussed within the Social Sciences arena. Fielding and Lee (1998) point to the advantages of using computers in qualitative research. Firstly computers can facilitate the task of data management. Decreasing the amount of time devoted to managing data makes the analysis process less tiresome. A second justification is that computers extend the capabilities of qualitative research; for example, allowing a second person to replicate an existing analysis of the data, working in teams if necessary. This possibility is almost impracticable following traditional qualitative techniques of data analysis. The third justification suggested by Fielding and Lee is that use of software can enhance credibility and acceptability of qualitative research.

Gahan and Hannibal (1998:1) illustrated some fictitious desires and fears that researchers have when beginning to use computer analysis in qualitative studies. Some researchers think that ‘the computer will distinguish the important bits and then make all the links between these bits’. In using computers for qualitative enquiry, however, the researchers are still in charge of building up the analysis, having the ideas, engaging with the data and making all the decisions about their study.

Observations

In order to test this research design, a pilot study with three secondary music teachers was carried out. This enabled the researcher to refine the techniques of gathering data for the main study, as well as to become familiarised with the equipment (e.g. video editing machine). Putting the methods in action was a way of becoming aware of some of their limitations.

One of the points arising from the pilot study was that when asking further questions about the teachers' comments on the videotaped extracts, it would sometimes be necessary to direct the conversation to the preliminary themes (Pupil-Environment-Process-Product). As mentioned previously, the interviews should be 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1988). This would help to clarify the teachers' views, encouraging them to reflect more deeply on their ideas. It would also be necessary to tape no less than three lessons with each teacher. For example, within a six-week composition project, it would be more likely to have an overall view of the composition process observing one lesson at the beginning, one lesson half way through the project and one lesson at the end.

Another point arising from the pilot study was the length of the interviews. The pilot with the first teacher showed clearly the difficulty of reducing the videotaped lessons from real time to a few extracts easily manageable within a normal interview time schedule. If the extracts were too long or too many, both the interviewer and the interviewee would be spending too much time viewing the tape that could otherwise be used for conducting the interview. During the interviews the participants and the researcher watched the extracts, stopping the video after each one, so that they could then comment on them. As one of the original research questions of the study dealt with the factors associated with the teachers' views on creativity (e.g. educational background), it was necessary to gather information about the participants' musical life and studies without spending too much of the interview time. Another way of finding out about the teachers' background was therefore sought. In order to save time when interviewing, it was decided to ask teachers to complete a 'Musical Career Path' sheet, derived from Denicolo and Pope (1990). Using an undulating path drawn on a single sheet teachers were asked to think back over their life experience and reflect on specific instances, or critical incidents which they considered had influenced the direction of their musical life, including experiences with their studies, music making and teaching. This technique, called 'critical incident charting' (Denicolo and Pope, 1990), has been used recently by Burnard (2000a) to research how pupils ascribe meaning to improvisation and composition. As far as the author is aware, it has not previously been used as a research tool with music teachers.

The six teachers in the main study taught in four different comprehensive schools, two in the London area and two in rural counties. The participants' comments during the interviews draw attention to many of the issues addressed in the literature on creativity. They referred to matters such as originality and the assessment of pupils' products. Participants also talked about the emotional environment, the intrinsic motivation of the students and the process of composing. The teachers' explanations of their own teaching provided insights into their perceptions of creativity, in relation to the four themes of the framework. Given the length of this paper the entire analysis of the interview transcripts is not described in detail. Instead, the intention is to focus on some of the categories concerning the teachers' definition of creativity, their role in teaching composing skills and the influence of teaching in developing their own creativity.

'Defining creativity'

The views of the teachers participating in the study seemed to support the idea of creativity as a general capacity of the students, a view previously suggested in the literature (Duffy, 1998; NACCCE, 1999):

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I suppose it implies ‘personal originality’. Because something for a particular individual may be highly creative, in that it is unique and a new experience for them, but within a wider social context might not be innovative....they could play something which is already, say commercially composed, but they may never have come across that.
(Sarah, commenting on video extracts of lessons of an inter-group competition Blues Project)

All of them in fact, are capable of producing a fine pop song....lots of them are absolutely very fine. I could hear them, if they were produced properly, they would be on top of the pops, you know....they are all capable of a good standard of music making.
(Emma, after watching extracts of a Pop song composition Project with her Year 9 groups)

Some confusion arose when accounts of the new concept (i.e. creativity as a ‘thinking style’) were presented as if they were characterisations of the traditional one (i.e. creativity as a creation of an original product recognised by the community):

I don’t feel that I can teach them to be creative. I mean if you are going to equate creativity with originality, then I suppose I couldn’t teach to them, it’s like just talking, and that would be coming from me, and not from them.
(Patrick, commenting extracts of his lessons on rondo improvisation with percussion instruments)

Defining the concept of ‘creativity’ was not free of difficulties. Some teachers did not have a set definition of the word and were aware of its complexity:

Whether I am teaching creativity, I’ve no idea...
(Elaine, commenting extracts of lessons of a unit in Jazz, Blues and improvisation)
I suppose I’m not really quite sure what you mean by being creative.
(Patrick)
I think that I’m probably still missing a point somewhere....I think there’s a lot I don’t know.
(Sarah)

Another participant pointed out that the music guidelines of the National Curriculum were not free of this conceptual confusion when defining the levels of attainment and the requirements to be taught to pupils:

I think philosophically and to some extent musicologically the National Curriculum is unclear and confused, and I think this is one of the areas [composing skills] in which it is. It’ll still come down to interpretation, interpretation by individual teachers, interpretation by people assessing, OFSTED...
(Sarah)

All these comments raise issues concerned with the production of National guidelines for teaching. Our ordinary language traditionally considers creativity as a gift owned by a few people. If teachers are to challenge this assumption in schools, a differentiation between the traditional concept of creativity and the notion of ‘imaginative thinking’ is needed. In order to avoid conceptual confusion, policy makers may well need to include in future guidelines an explanation of what is meant by the word ‘creativity’.

‘The teachers’ role when teaching composing skills’

Participants’ comments about their role when teaching improvisation and composition were coded under the “Teachers’ role” category, within the initial ‘environment’ theme of the

framework. Teachers described their role as ‘facilitator’, ‘nurturer’ and ‘helper’, sometimes just setting up the conditions in which pupils could explore their ideas:

A kind of facilitator, as someone who can provide them with experience and advice....to get what they want from the music, because often they kind of know what they want it to sound like, but they find it very difficult to actually make it sound like that.
(Sarah)

They commented that depending on the activity (e.g. group improvisation, individual improvisation, composition, etc.) and the pupils, they would give them prompts or ideas to develop:

If you are doing a composition, you can give them a structure to start with, or give them ideas when they’re composing to develop their ideas.
(Helen)

They generally agreed that one of the main roles was to facilitate the environment in which pupils could make music. One teacher felt that she only gave pupils the activities and the instruments they wish, and that her input was the minimum due to the freedom of the project (i.e. pupils were asked to compose music for a film scene):

We gave them information, we gave them the actual film, and we put them in a group that they had to work in, on a particular scene. So, if anything, we just sort of described in much detail what action was going on. And they had to imitate that action through their music. And whatever they came up with, was their own musical ideas....rather than me telling them ‘use this scale, use this particular ostinato’, it was just more of a ‘let us just see what they come up with’. We didn’t give them any particular tools to use.
(Laura, commenting some video extracts of her lessons)

Participants suggested that building up an environment where students feel comfortable to play in front of each other and also trying to develop their confidence, was a key point in opening up the creativity of the pupils:

Try to develop confidence in them in what they are doing so they’ll have a go, and try things out.
(Elaine)

The comments and descriptions by participants of the appropriate emotional environment to develop the pupils’ creativity, though, were coded under another category and it would be out of the scope of this paper to explain them further.

‘The teachers’ own creativity’

The last issue to be explored in this section is the teachers’ views of their own creativity. Participants by and large complained about their lack of training in either composing or the teaching of composing skills. Two teachers commented that in their own secondary education, they were asked to produce a piece of music and ‘weren’t taught how to do it’. Some referred to the music courses in their university degrees as ‘too traditional’, where they did mainly ‘pastiche composition’. Others complained about the Postgraduate Course in Education (PGCE) and the training they received there to become teachers. As Helen and Patrick put it:

On my PGCE we played around with improvisation....but we didn’t discuss, sort of big ideas and how to go about composing. (...) I do sometimes....wish I’d studied it further, to be able to bring more ideas in.

(Helen, after watching some extracts of lessons of a Year 7 unit on composing)

At the PGCE course we were taught how to teach composition, and we had to produce....two compositions of our own. But, I remember finding it quite difficult....I think, ironically enough, that we weren’t actually taught very well at how to compose ourselves....Now, if I was asked to compose, I would actually do a much better job through the teaching that I’ve done.

(Patrick)

Teachers generally considered themselves creative and some commented that teaching gave them opportunities to fulfil this creativity:

Time and time again....I will have ideas for what I’m doing when I’m teaching, that I have not had before, until that split second moment in the lesson....and that, for me as a teacher, is very interesting with this whole emphasis upon planning to the ‘nth degree, and this idea of....aims and objectives that you tick off at the end, and I don’t approach my teaching in such a rigid way.

(Patrick)

This comment raises a further issue concerned with classroom organisation. This emphasis on “planning to the ‘nth degree”, as Patrick observes, could well be hindering the opportunities for the teachers’ development of their creativity. It was noted by some participants that creativity in their music-making and in their teaching were two complementary things:

As a teacher I’m creative in a different sense, because I’m not coming up with the ideas initially, but actually looking at how we can extend students’ ideas....You can’t go in with a set idea of how it’s going to come out, because it never does, because the students have changed it....I say a certain idea and it comes out completely different, and that’s fine, as long as it fits.

(Helen)

With newly qualified teachers in particular, the responsibility to plan all their lessons with aims and objectives and to tick off the results at the end may well be taking away some of the unpredictability of the teaching and learning process. Pupils on the other hand, can have a positive influence in developing the teachers’ own creativity. One of the participants, a self-taught songwriter and studio singer, acknowledged her pupils as one of her main sources of inspiration, and considered herself a ‘senior learner’. The following quote, left uncut because of its illustrative value, exemplifies this view:

[Emma] I have to say that the training I had for a year when I did the jazz course actually really hindered my creativity afterwards, and I found it really difficult to get back to that place of writing songs and creating, because I’d been given so much technique, so many rules that it just...it almost destroyed it for me. I then got into teaching because I couldn’t write songs any more, I really couldn’t. Fortunately, because of teaching, because you went back to really basics with teaching, you were talking about simplicity, repetition, you know, very simple things, I think that helped me get back. And I think actually having to put myself

into a situation where I was attempting to teach people how to make up, or compose simple things, helped me to get back to a place where I could write songs myself.

[Oscar] So, would you say that your pupils help your own creativity?

[Emma] Oh yes, yes, definitely. Yes, I get a lot from them. Just as much from them, a lot from them. And it should be like that, because I suppose in a way, I don’t feel like I’m a teacher. I just feel like I am a SENIOR learner.... I’m definitely a senior learner and the teaching just happens to be the fact that I’m older than they are. But I forget they are kids all the time and, you know, the best times I have are when we’re sort of making music together. And I think that is how it works, at least for me.

As Cox (1999) points out, the study of teachers’ own assessments of their experience enlarges our understanding of their professional lives. The research where the teachers’ quotes are taken was aimed at exploring music educator’s views of creativity. The purpose was not to look for the generalisation of a theory but to illustrate through the teachers’ voice some of the issues of this area of knowledge. The intention in this paper was to focus on the participants’ definition of creativity, their role in teaching composing skills and the influence of teaching in developing their own creativity. The trends and issues suggested might be further explored to see how they stand in relation to the data from a different sample. The teachers’ comments exemplified the complexities in defining the term creativity. Participants’ comments also suggested that both pupils’ creativity and the teaching of composing skills had a positive influence in developing the teachers’ own creativity. The complex process of shaping the research techniques in response to the type of educational enquiry has also been reflected. It is clear that a statutory curriculum does not lead to the harmonisation of the educators’ views. Research into the views of music educators and the factors related to variations in their perceptions is needed. Teachers have their own concept of creativity and these ideas can influence their pedagogic approach and assessment of activities that are meant to develop the pupils’ musical creativity (e.g. composition and improvisation).

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